

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks on the 10th Anniversary of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in McLean, Virginia

April 24, 2015

Thank you so much. Please, please, have a seat. Thank you very much. Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Please. Well, thank you, Jim, for that introduction. And former Director Negroponte, we are—there he is—we are thrilled to have you here as well.

I am here to help mark the 10th anniversary of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. And I'm here for a simple reason: Jim asked me to come. *[Laughter]* You see, as you might say with the IC, Jim is one of my best HUMINT sources. He is well placed. His reporting is known to be reliable. So I accepted his invitation with a high degree of confidence. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank you, Jim, and your entire team and leaders from across the IC, for all of you taking the time to welcoming me here today. I'm not going to give a long speech, but I do have three basic messages that I wanted to convey.

The first is that I don't know how astute a consumer of information I am, but I can tell you I sure do rely on it. And those who come and brief me every single morning do an extraordinary job. I will say that the only flaw, generally, in what's called the PDB that I receive is that when Jim provides it, some of you may have heard, he leaves paperclips all over my office. *[Laughter]* They're in the couch; they're on the floor. He's shuffling paper. And so because I knew I was coming over here, one of the things I did was return them all. *[Laughter]* And so this will be available to you. I don't—DNI's budget is always a little tight; we can start recycling these. *[Laughter]* That's going to be critical.

But Jim is often one of the first people that I see in the morning, during the Presidential Daily Brief. Jim always gives it to me straight. He gives me his honest assessment free of politics, free of spin. I trust his integrity. And I can't tell you how invaluable that is in the job that he has. And that culture is one that permeates our IC. It's a culture that reflects the leaders at the top. And nobody, I think, exemplifies that more than Jim Clapper. So I am very grateful for him.

Here at ODNI, Jim has also led important reforms, both within the office and across the intelligence community. Today, the community is more collaborative and more integrated than it has ever been in the past.

And since no good deed ever goes unpunished, in appreciation of this integrity and outstanding work, I sent Jim to North Korea. *[Laughter]* And I know he had a wonderful time in Pyongyang. But thanks to the role that Jim played, he returned home with Kenneth Bae and Matthew Miller to be reunited with their families.

Today is also special to him because it happens to be his 50th wedding anniversary to his wonderful wife Sue. So we want to congratulate the two of them. And fear not, this is not all he's doing for their 50th wedding anniversary. *[Laughter]* My understanding is, they're headed off for a well-deserved anniversary vacation this weekend. So I'm going to move this along. *[Laughter]*

The second reason I wanted to be here was to thank all of you at ODNI. I see Jim or Mike Dempsey, or sometimes Stephanie, every morning. And I know that everything they present reflects incredible hard work on the part of hundreds of people—thousands of people across the various agencies that are represented. And I want you to know that Jim and Mike and Stephanie and all the folks who give me these briefings, they are the first one to acknowledge that they are just the tip of the operation and that they can't do their job if it weren't for the incredible contributions that all of you are making every single day.

I know that sometimes it can seem like a one-way street. You push up your reports, but you don't always know how your work is received by your customers, and I guess I'm the number-one customer. You don't always maybe get feedback. So I'm here just to tell you, you do an outstanding job. The work that you provide is vital for me being able to make good decisions. And the fact that the work you prepare is giving it to me straight—that doesn't look at the world through rose-colored glasses, that doesn't exaggerate threats, but doesn't underplay the significant challenges that we face around the world—that's vitally important to me and, as a consequence, vitally important to the security of the American people.

So Jim knows it; Mike know it. The people who meet with me are always extolling your virtues. But I figured it would be useful for you to hear it from me directly in saying how much we appreciate the incredible hard work and effort that you make every single day.

Whether it's the PDB, your daily articles, your expert briefs, NIE's, I could not do my job without your insights and your analysis and your judgment.

More broadly, you're dedicated to your founding mission. The 9/11 Commission said we needed to unify our intelligence community. The legislation that created the DNI made you the statutory head of the community overseeing all the agencies.

And it's not an easy task bringing together 17 different organizations. They each have unique histories and missions and cultures and tradecraft. Many of you here represent those agencies. And yet you come here together to create a sum that's even greater and stronger than its individual parts.

And we see the results. We've got more sharing of intelligence across the community and also beyond it, with our other partners. Federal, State, local, and private sectors are now working together more effectively than they have in the past. New technologies and new satellites are being shared, and working across various platforms means that we're able to do a better job both accumulating information, but also disseminating it. There's more transparency than there's been in the past. There's more innovation than there's been in the past. All that is making a difference each and every day.

I know that integrating the efforts and contributions of all 17 organizations, people, expertise, capabilities, is never-ending work. And then, there's the challenge of being as open and transparent as possible, even as we continue to protect intelligence that saves lives.

But I want you to remember the United States is the most professional, most capable, most cutting-edge intelligence community in the world. And part of the reason is because all of you here at ODNI bring it together. It makes a difference.

Which brings me to my third and final point. A message that I hope you share with the colleagues who are not in this auditorium, I want you to share it with all the home agencies: You can take great pride in your service.

Many of you—those of you with gray beards or goatees, or in Jim's case, just no hair—[laughter]—are intelligence veterans with decades of service. Some of you are young, and look even younger, a new post-9/11 generation. And over the years, I know some of you have lost good friends and colleagues: patriots, men and women who gave their lives, like those honored in the stars on the Memorial Wall at Langley. On days like today, we remember them and we honor them as well.

These are challenging times. And over the last few years, we've seen unprecedented intelligence disclosures. We've seen wild swings with respect to our budgets because of sequestration and furloughs; increasing demands for intelligence due to everything from Russian aggression in Ukraine to turmoil and ISIL in the Middle East.

And today, like all Americans, our thoughts and prayers also continue to be with the families of Dr. Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto. I'm not going to repeat everything I said yesterday, but I do want to make one point again. We're going to review what happened. We're going to identify the lessons that can be learned and any improvements and changes that can be made. And I know those of you who are here share our determination to continue doing everything we can to prevent the loss of innocent lives.

I was asked by somebody, how do you absorb news like that that we received the other day? And I told the truth: It's hard. But the one thing I wanted everybody to know—because I know you, because I work with you, because I know the quality of this team—is that we all bleed when we lose an American life. We all grieve when any innocent life is taken. We don't take this work lightly. And I know that each and every one of you understand the magnitude of what we do and the stakes involved.

And these aren't abstractions. And we're not cavalier about what we do, and we understand the solemn responsibilities that are given to us. And our first job is to make sure that we protect the American people. But there's not a person that I talk to that's involved in the intelligence community that doesn't—that also doesn't understand that we have to do so while upholding our values and our ideals and our laws and our constitutions and our commitment to democracy.

And that's part of the reason why I'm so grateful to work with you, because I know you share that commitment, understanding that this is hard stuff. Everybody here is committed to doing it the right way. And for that reason, I'm absolutely committed to making sure that the American people understand all that you put in to make sure that we do it the right way. I'm very grateful for that.

This self-reflection, this willingness to examine ourselves, to make corrections, to do better—that's part of what makes us Americans. It's part of what sets us apart from other nations. It's part of what keeps us not only safe, but also strong and free.

And part of what makes our job even more challenging is, is that despite the extraordinary work that's done here and the lives that are saved on an ongoing basis, a lot of our work still requires that we maintain some things as classified. And we can't always talk about all the challenges. And the one thing I know about people in the IC is they don't seek the limelight. That means, sometimes, that the world doesn't always see your successes: the threats that you prevent or the terrorist attacks you thwart or the lives that you save.

But I don't want you or folks across the intelligence community to ever forget the difference that you make every day. Because of you, we've had the intelligence to take out Al Qaida leaders, including Usama bin Laden. Because of you, we've had the intelligence, quickly,

that showed Syria had used chemical weapons and then had the ability to monitor its removal. Because of you, we had the intelligence, despite Russia's obfuscations, to tell the world the truth about the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine. Because of you, we had the intelligence support that helped enable our recent nuclear framework with Iran. And you're going to be critical to our efforts to forge a comprehensive deal to prevent Iran from ever getting a nuclear weapon.

So you help keep us safe, but you also help protect our freedoms by doing it the right way. And the American people and people around the world may never know the full extent of your success. There may be those outside who question or challenge what we do, and we welcome those questions and those challenges because that makes us better. It can be frustrating sometimes, but that's part of the function of our democracy.

But I know what you do. We're more secure because of your service. We're more secure because of your patriotism and your professionalism. And I'm grateful for that. And the American people are grateful as well: to you and your families who sacrifice alongside you.

So it's been 10 long and challenging years. But when we look back on those 10 years, the American people have been a whole lot safer. And I'm confident that over the next 10 years and 10 years after that, as long as we continue to have outstanding patriots like yourselves, we're going to be okay.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:40 p.m. in the Liberty Crossing Auditorium of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. In his remarks, he referred to Kenneth Bae and Matthew T. Miller, U.S. citizens who were detained in North Korea until their release in November 2014; Deputy Director of National Intelligence Michael P. Dempsey; and Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence Stephanie O'Sullivan; and U.S. Agency for International Development contractor Warren Weinstein and Italian aid worker Giovanni Lo Porto, who were killed in a U.S. counterterrorism operation against an Al Qaida compound in Pakistan on January 15. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.

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Locations: McLean, VA.

Names: Bae, Kenneth; Clapper, James R., Jr.; Clapper, Sue; Dempsey, Michael P.; Lo Porto, Giovanni; Miller, Matthew T.; Negroponte, John D.; O'Sullivan, Stephanie; Weinstein, Warren.

Subjects: Central Intelligence Agency; Deaths : Lo Porto, Giovanni; Deaths : Weinstein, Warren; Defense and national security : Classified national security information; Defense and national security : Intelligence; Government organization and employees : Funding lapse and partial furlough; Intelligence, Office of the Director of National; Iran : International diplomatic efforts; Iran : Nuclear weapons development; Iraq : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; Italy : Death of Italian aid worker in U.S. counterterrorism operation in Pakistan; North Korea : International diplomatic efforts; Pakistan : Death of U.S. and Italian aid workers in U.S. counterterrorism operation; Russia : Relations with Ukraine; Syria : Chemical weapons stockpile, international removal efforts; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist

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